

I have attended a couple meetings recently about the upcoming Discover Wisconsin feature on Evansville. And there is quite a bit going on in preparation of the TV show.

The television crew will be back in Evansville two more times. This Saturday, February 6, they will cover the Chocolate Extravaganza. While here, they will also take care of a few loose ends with indoor filming and interviews. Then on April 23, they will attend the Energy Fair. And, with the return of springtime, they will take care of any remaining outdoor filming.

In talking with Monroe and Columbus which have been featured by Discover Wisconsin, their hotels, retail, and dining establishments saw noticeable increases in visitors immediately after the TV show. And the foot traffic was sustained throughout the summer and into future years. With the current economic recession, the public has greater emphasis on affordable “stay-cations” and daytrips. Evansville is in an excellent position to promote itself as a “Drive to Destination” for these visitors.

Creative Committee. Last spring, we named a Creative Committee to work with the Discover Wisconsin crew on people, events, and attractions to cover in the show. The Creative Committee includes representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and from Evansville Community Partnership, local historian Ruth Ann Montgomery, Cobblestone Inn & Suites manager Brad Moellenberndt, and Alderperson Todd Culbertson.

With staff changes at the Chamber, at ECP, and also at Discover Wisconsin the Creative Committee members have changed some. But they will re-convene in late April to review the actual script for the show and make sure it portrays Evansville accurately. In mid-May, Discover Wisconsin will edit the script and film. And in late May, the Creative Committee will be able to review the actual show. The show will air on Saturday, June 12.

Premier Party. To celebrate the show, we are planning a Premier Party. On Thursday, June 10, we are going to have a special preview showing of the Discover Wisconsin television feature on a movie screen in Leonard-Leota Park. Since school will be out, plans are to make this a family-friendly Kickoff to Summer: a festival tent, food, and cartoons or short movies on the big screen. Bring your own blanket and lawn chairs.

Evansville Community Partnership has the expertise and experience for organizing events and will certainly help with this one. But they are currently busy with preparations for the Chili Cookoff, Fourth of July, and Windmills on Parade. So they will need and get plenty of help and volunteers for the Premier Party. And, although we are still looking at the event budget, it will likely allow several groups or organizations to have food stands for fundraisers.

Spring Cleaning. If you can imagine the snow melted, Evansville looks great. Our park is well maintained, businesses and residents take pride in their properties, and the bricks and other amenities are a great addition to the downtown. But with the television crew’s

final filming visit in mid April and visitors coming throughout the summer, we need to put extra attention to our curb appeal.

This includes cutting weeds, picking up litter, planting flower baskets, landscaping around welcome signs, and arranging attractive window displays. And I would like to see some coordination that our few empty storefronts allow local artwork, historic items, or other interesting displays; there is no benefit to empty windows downtown.

Some of this spring cleaning is organized. For example the City's Economic Development Committee works with Evansville Community Partnership for the flower baskets and banners on the lightpoles downtown. But much of it will need individual commitment; everyone needs to do their part to help Evansville look its best.

Business Promotion. And our businesses have an additional, vested interest in the Discover Wisconsin marketing. Each business might have different needs or responses, but they really should not ignore the opportunity to capitalize on this unique promotion.

One business I spoke with recently was planning on a new more visible sign, now he has a deadline to get it installed before the TV show. A business may have been considering a website, another may be expanding its inventory into a new line, or maybe one needs its own brochure. What about a Discover Wisconsin promotion or sale? And how about expanded weekend hours when people are most likely to visit?

As for City Hall, the biggest need I see is improvement of our website. The visitors section of the City's website needs to display the Discover Wisconsin "Choice Destination" logo, it needs to include information on events and attractions specifically highlighted in the TV show, hotlinks to the Chamber of Commerce and Community Partnership websites need to be more user-friendly, and it needs to be up to date. These are all things I am committed to accomplishing well before the TV show airs.

Community Marketing. The TV show may be the most prominent part of Discover Wisconsin with a viewer base of over 8 million households. But it also includes a radio series, calendar of events, website integration and video clips, trade shows and expos, press releases and public relations, and other cross promotions.

To really take advantage of the Discover Wisconsin name recognition, I expect Evansville will capitalize on as many of these opportunities as we can. One example is an updated brochure which will be going to print in about a week. It includes a calendar of events, business listing and map, description of local attractions, and a shortened version of the historic walking tour. And it is designed to fit in a standard #10 envelope without requiring additional postage.

Discover Wisconsin will distribute our brochure at their booth during the Milwaukee Sports Show this March 10-14. They also have exhibits at the Madison Fishing Expo and the Camping & RV Show in Green Bay. We can distribute the brochure to neighboring

communities and wayside displays. And, of course, we can use it ourselves in the new visitor center, at Cobblestone Inn & Suites, City Hall, and Chamber of Commerce.

Another marketing example is the video clip player. Details are in the works, but we will likely post this off the Chamber of Commerce website. It will show clips from the Discover Wisconsin TV show and other high-definition local videos. And it will have the opportunity for local banner ads. With links from the Discover Wisconsin website, we can really use this as a virtual point of contact to promote Evansville's events, attractions, and businesses.

There is a lot going on behind the scenes for Discover Wisconsin and the TV feature on Evansville. And there is a lot still to do. It offers a great opportunity to capitalize on their name recognition. This is something in which our residents, and especially our businesses, should take an interest.